MARVEL

DOCTOR STRANGE®

#25

BARBER
NOWLAN
FRIGERI

STEPHEN STRANGE was a preeminent surgeon until a car accident damaged the nerves in his hands. His ego drove him to scour the globe for a miracle cure, but instead he found a mysterious wizard called the ANCIENT ONE who taught him magic and that there are things in this world bigger than himself. These lessons led Stephen to become the Sorcerer Supreme, Earth's first defense against all manner of magical threats. His patients call him...

DOCTOR STRANGE

Magic on Earth is slowly recovering after it was nearly destroyed by anti-magic zealots from another dimension. On a quest to collect one of the last remaining enchanted artifacts, Stephen Strange became poisoned. His friend Zelma Stanton transferred the deadly poison to herself to save him, but to cure her, Strange had to confer some of his own magical immunity. He did so over his assistant Wong's objections--changing Zelma forever in unforeseeable ways--and Wong left the Sanctum Sanctorum.

Now Zelma is Doctor Strange's apprentice, trying to help him navigate a world where magic is scarce and the Sorcerer Supreme must learn to use it more responsibly.

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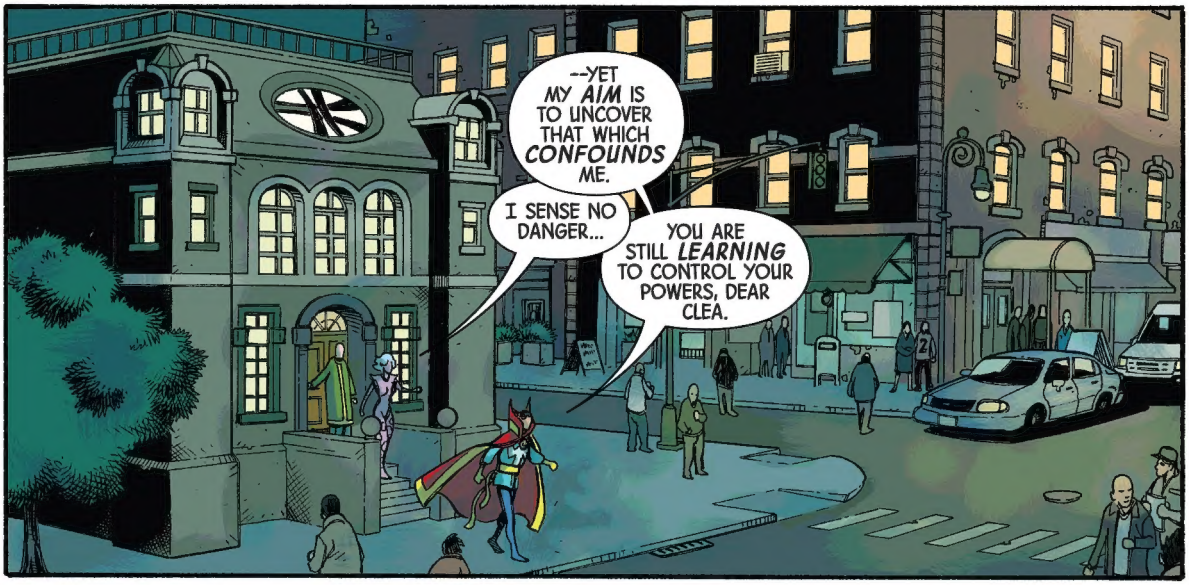
I MISS WAFFLES.
IN THE OLD DAYS WE USED MAGIC TO MAKE WAFFLES.
ALSO, I THINK YOU MADE A TRANSCRIPTION ERROR IN THE BOOK OF SPELLS...
...I DON'T THINK I USUALLY CALL FORTH A "FOUR BOARDING" APPARITION.
QUIT TRYING TO MAKE ME FEEL LIKE LIFE IS NORMAL, STRANGE.
OH, I'D NEVER DO THAT. THE EXTRAORDINARY IS WHAT WE TRAFFIC IN, ZELMA.
THE ODDNESS BECOMES PART OF US. SOMETIMES LITERALLY.
UH-HUH. WHAT'S THAT MEAN?
WELL, SOME TIME AGO, I...
...I...
THAT'S ODD. IT'S JUST ON THE TIP OF MY MIND. USUALLY MY RECALL IS QUITE--

--SOUND.
LOOKS LIKE ZELMA WAS SERIOUS ABOUT THE *WAFFLES.*
ZELMA-- CAN YOU HEAR ME?
I START ELIMINATING *POSSIBILITIES.* AN OUTSIDE AGENCY PHYSICALLY MANIPULATING MY APPRENTICE?
I GUESS *NOT.*
A *PSYCHIC TAKEOVER* SEEMS MORE LIKELY. BUT BY WHOM--AND *HOW?*
SLAM
LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS!
MY *SANCTUM SANCTORUM* SHOULD BE A *REFUGE* FROM ANY ATTACK.
BUT THINGS DON'T ALWAYS WORK AS ONE *EXPECTS.*
KRSSH
THAT'S WHY WE HAVE *DOCTORS.*

EVER SINCE THE MAGIC DIED, I'VE HAD TO RELY ON ARTIFACTS IMBUED WITH POWER.
BUT ARTIFACTS HAVE LIMITATIONS. THESE PEOPLE...
...THEY'VE BEEN WARPED BY WHATEVER'S TURNED ZELMA AGAINST ME.
THE AX IS USELESS, IF I DON'T WANT TO KILL THEM.
AND I DON'T.
THEY ON THE OTHER HAND...
BUT I'M BOTHERED BY SOMETHING ELSE--MORE THAN GREENWICH VILLAGE DECIDING TO MURDER ME.
I JUST CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING... THIS HAS ALL HAPPENED BEFORE.

ALONE! IN DEEPEST CONCENTRATION, DR. STRANGE'S MIND WRESTLES WITH FORCES OLDER THAN TIME...
...BUT HIS FACE BETRAYS NO WEAKNESS--
--MERELY A PRETERNATURAL SENSE OF LOOMING DANGER!
SOMETHING UNNATURAL PASSES NEARBY.
STEPHEN! WHAT BROKE YOUR MEDITATIVE TRANCE?
HE IS TOO DEEP IN CONCENTRATION TO HEAR YOU, MISS CLEA.
I HEAR, WONG--I HESITATE ONLY BECAUSE THE ANSWER IS UNCLEAR--


--YET MY AIM IS TO UNCOVER THAT WHICH CONFOUNDS ME.
I SENSE NO DANGER...
YOU ARE STILL LEARNING TO CONTROL YOUR POWERS, DEAR CLEA.

I FEAR ONLY A MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS CAN FEEL SUCH FOREBODINGS.

SOME UNEARTHLY FORCE THIS WAY COMES, MY FRIENDS.
AND WITH THAT, THE SORCERER SUPREME'S FINGERS CONTORT-- CASTING A SPELL OF SUMMONING...

...AN ACT WHICH PROVES PROVIDENTIAL... IN ITS OWN WAY!
BY THE GODS!

WONG! CLEA!
DO YOU NOT RECOGNIZE DOCTOR STRANGE?!

IN THE NAME OF THE *ETERNAL VISHANTI*--
--WHAT UNEARTHLY PHANTASM TRANSFORMS MY *CLOSEST FRIENDS*?!
AND WHAT HAS IT DONE TO MY *WORLD*?

YEAH...THIS RINGS A BELL.
AND NOT A VERY GOOD-SOUNDING ONE.
THESE LINES OF MYSTICAL ENERGY ARE COMING FROM SOMEWHERE, SO AT LEAST I HAVE A GOAL.

HAS ALL OF MANHATTAN FALLEN? ALL OF EARTH?
AND I HAD A WHOLE DAY PLANNED...

HURRAGHH!

I BARELY STOP MYSELF FROM USING THE AX.
THIS WAS NEVER AN ISSUE WHEN I WIELDED UNLIMITED POWER.

NOW I'VE GOT TO WATCH MYSELF.
DAMMIT. THIS IS GOING TO HURT.

HURFF!

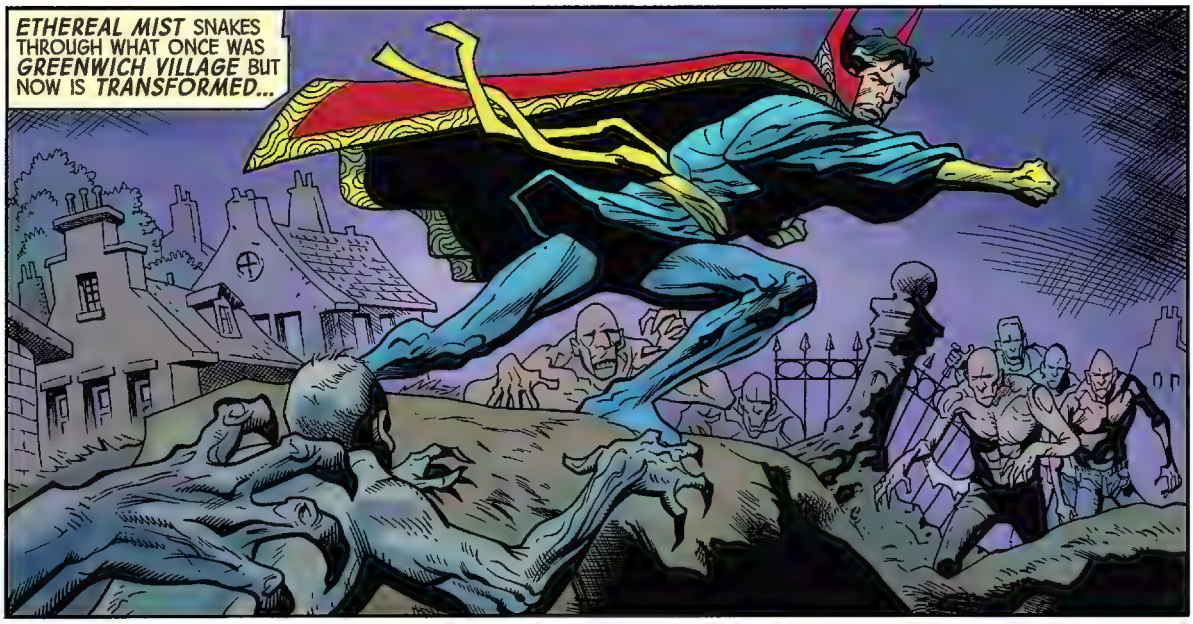
COME ON!
NONE OF YOU WANT TO PLAY FAIR? ANYBODY AT LEAST WANT TO EXPOSIT?
STOP

ZELMA--YOU UNDERSTAND MAGIC. YOU KNOW HOW THIS WORKS.
BREAK FREE FROM WHATEVER'S CONTROLLING YOU!

URNFF!
SO MUCH FOR THAT STRATEGY.
STOP

SORRY.
CRONGG

BUT I WAS RIGHT... ZELMA SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESIST.
NOTHING ADDS UP. I KNOW SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED IN THE PAST...
...BUT WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER MORE?


ETHEREAL MIST SNAKES THROUGH WHAT ONCE WAS GREENWICH VILLAGE BUT NOW IS TRANSFORMED...

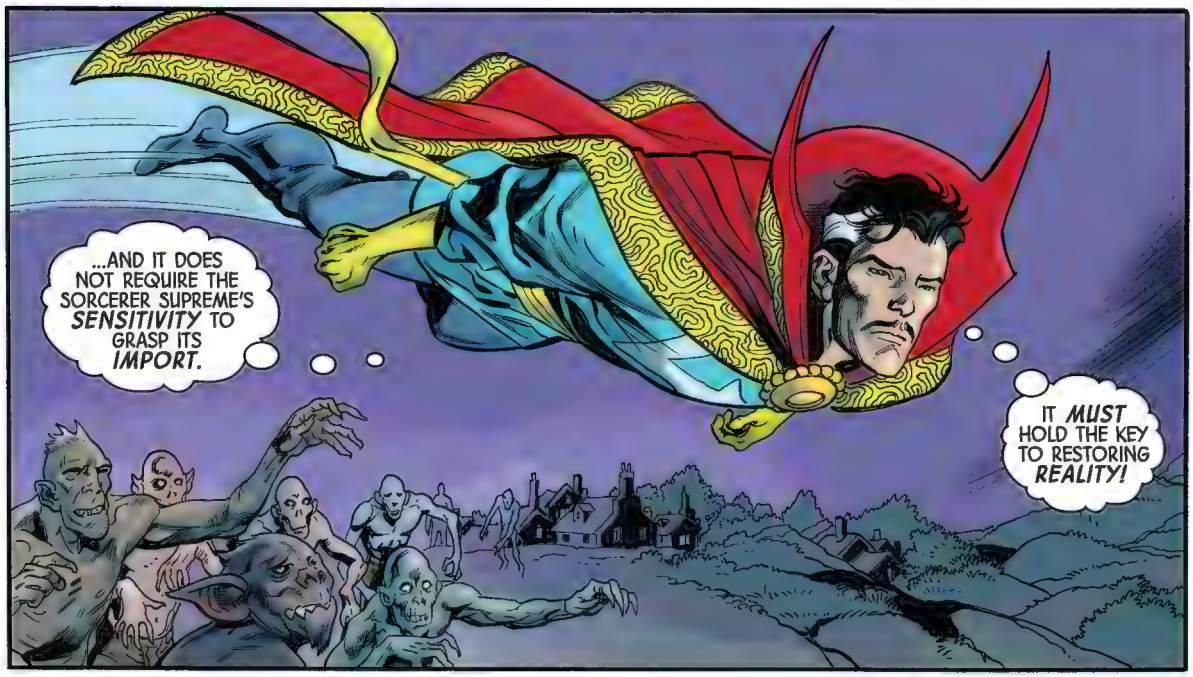
...AS ARE ITS DENIZENS!
BY THE VIPERS OF VALTORR--
--BE THESE MAN OR ILLUSION? AND HOW MAY I FREE CLEA AND WONG FROM THRALLDOM?

WHATEVER YOU ARE, AND WHATEVER YOU HAVE DONE TO MY FRIENDS...
...GAZE INTO MY AMULET-- AS IT GAZES INTO YOU!
COMMANDED BY A THOUGHT, THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO OPENS...

...TO NO AVAIL!
-FLAS

ANOTHER COURSE OF ACTION MUST BE UNDERTAKEN...

...FORTUNATELY, THE PATHWAY IS UNAMBIGUOUS!
THIS CITADEL WAS NOT HERE, EVEN MOMENTS AGO...


...AND IT DOES NOT REQUIRE THE SORCERER SUPREME'S SENSITIVITY TO GRASP ITS IMPORT.
IT MUST HOLD THE KEY TO RESTORING REALITY!

OKAY. THAT'S SOMETHING.
NOT EXACTLY A CITADEL...
...BUT MAYBE THIS IS THE NEXT BEST THING.
A HOSPITAL. OF COURSE.
AND ONE THAT SPECIALIZES IN PSYCHIATRIC AILMENTS, NO LESS.
HOSPITAL
OH, PLEASE!
I CAN'T FIGHT YOU!
I'VE HAD ABOUT ALL I CAN TAKE.
HOSPITAL
THERE BETTER BE SOMETHING GOOD INSIDE.

THE MEREST GESTURE, AND THE ETHEREAL FORTRESS' DEFENSES FALL...
...BUT THE MASTER OF MYSTIC ARTS IS TRANSFIXED WITH AWE BY THE SHIVERING, SHIMMERING NON-PLACE WITHIN!
TRANSFIXED...BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT!
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH--
--WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?
BOLTS OF BEDEVILMENT FLASH FROM THE DOCTOR'S FISTS...
...CARVING A PATH THROUGH THE UNKNOWN AND THE UNTHINKABLE!
SHOW YOURSELF, PRECEPTOR OF THIS UNEARTHLY ABYSS!
FACE THE MYSTIC MIGHT OF--
CURSE ME FOR A NOVICE!
YOU CONTROL THIS LANDLESS SPACE?

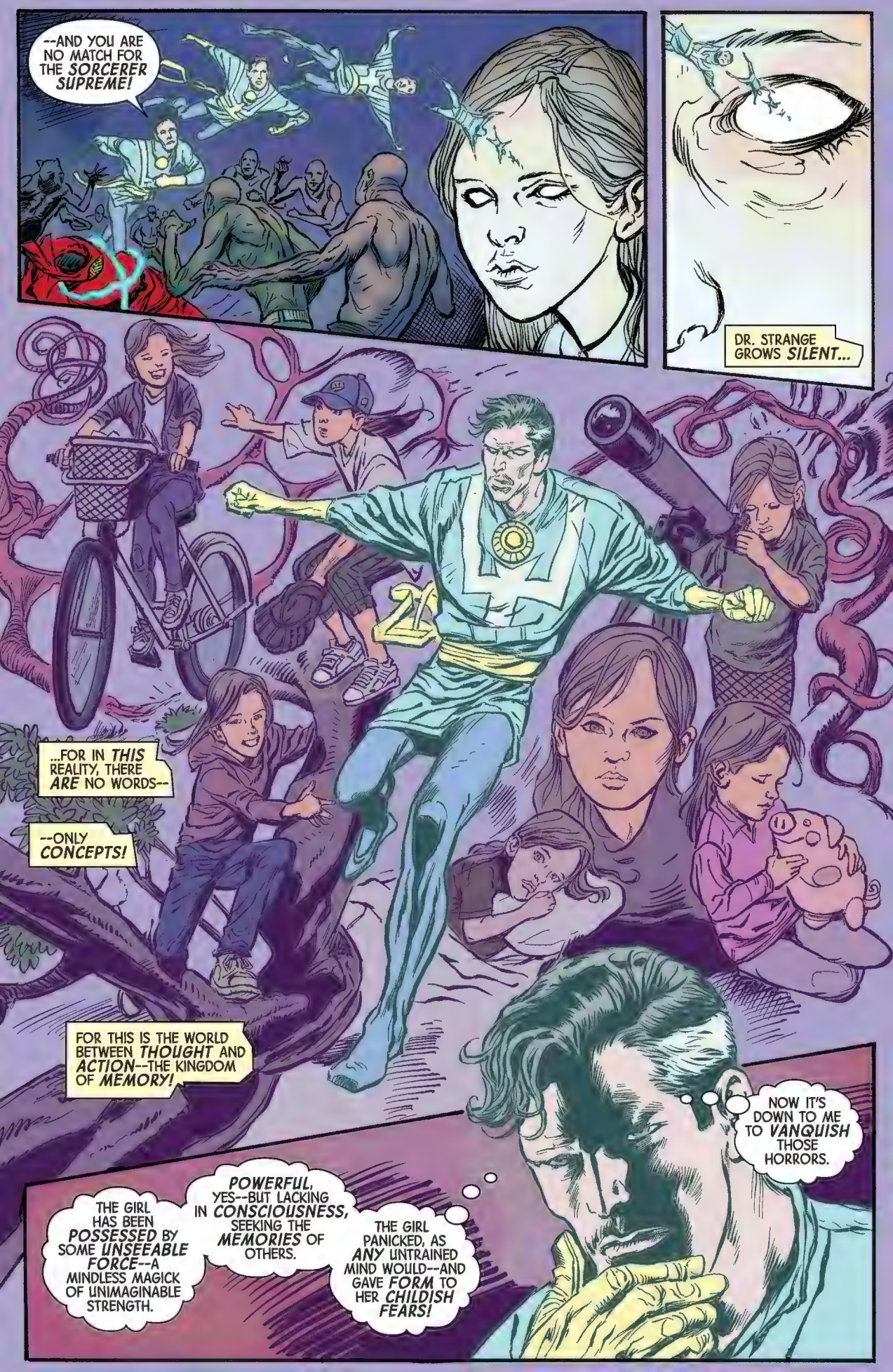
I...
...AM...
...POWER!
A CHILD! AN INNOCENT, TRAPPED IN A WORLD SHE CANNOT UNDERSTAND--
--A REALITY I DARE NOT ALLOW HER TO COMPREHEND!
COME WITH ME, GIRL-- QUICKLY!
HNNG!
...I...
...AM...
...ALL!

THE GIRL...I'D FORGOTTEN HER.
THAT'S...VERY UNUSUAL. SOMETHING'S MESSING WITH REALITY.
UNG!
BUT I SUPPOSE I ALREADY KNEW THAT.
THE MYSTIC ENERGY BOLT CAME FROM THIS WAY.
IT WASN'T MEANT TO KILL...
...WHICH IS DISCONCERTING.

THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED...
...THE HAUNTED GIRL.
SURPRISED TO SEE ME AGAIN?
OR SURPRISED TO REMEMBER ME AT ALL?
HONESTLY, A LITTLE OF BOTH.

INTO THE CLUTCHES OF HIS FRIENDS TURNED DESTRUCTORS FALLS STRANGE--
--REMINDING THE MYSTIC OF THE ONE TRUTH THAT HOLDS FIRM IN THIS CURIOUS REALM...
...THE TRUTH OF HIS OWN MORTALITY!
AGAIN SHINES THE ALL-PENETRATING AMULET--
--AND AGAIN THE MYSTICAL ENERGY FALLS SHORT.
WHAT MANNER OF POWER HAS TAKEN HOLD OF THE POOR CHILD?
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY RESIST THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO...
OF COURSE!
THE TIME FOR PONDERING ENDS AS QUICKLY AS IT BEGAN...
...BUT EVEN AS THE UNNATURAL THREATENS TO OVERWHELM HIM...

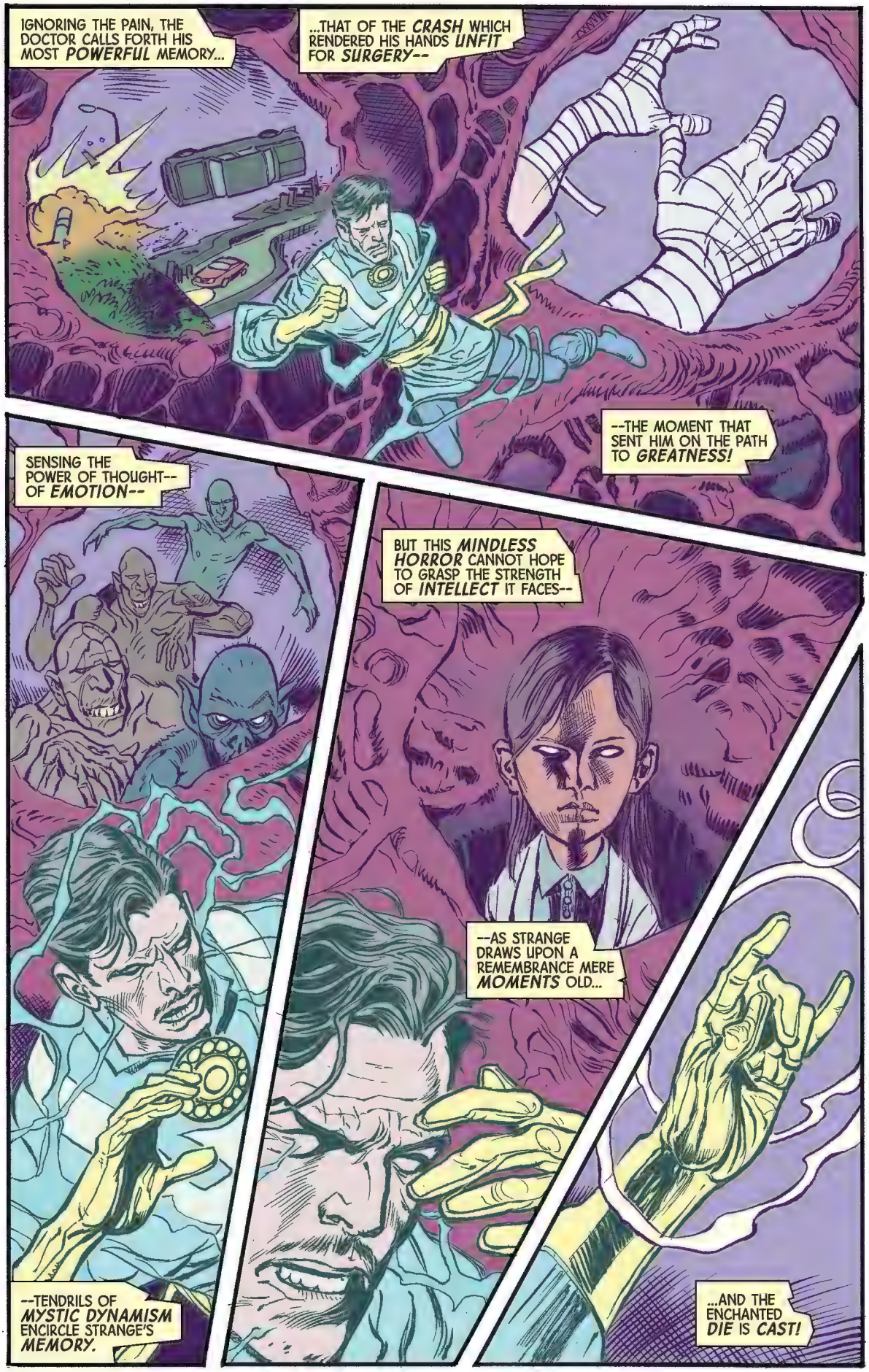
...DR. STRANGE PROVES WHY HE IS SUPREME--
--RECOGNIZING THE SPELL-SPAWNED CREATURES FOR WHAT THEY ARE!
NOT MONSTERS...
...MERELY THE IDEA OF MONSTERS.
STRAY THOUGHTS DRAWN FROM A CHILD'S MIND...
...MEMORIES GRANTED ECTOPLASMIC FORM...
...BY A POWER FROM BEYOND OUR WORLD.
I...
...AM...
I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, CREATURE!
NOW UNDERSTAND WHOM YOU FACE!
THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT MANKIND IS MINE--


--AND YOU ARE NO MATCH FOR THE SORCERER SUPREME!
DR. STRANGE GROWS SILENT...
...FOR IN THIS REALITY, THERE ARE NO WORDS--
--ONLY CONCEPTS!
FOR THIS IS THE WORLD BETWEEN THOUGHT AND ACTION--THE KINGDOM OF MEMORY!
NOW IT'S DOWN TO ME TO VANQUISH THOSE HORRORS.
THE GIRL HAS BEEN POSSESSED BY SOME UNSEEABLE FORCE--A MINDLESS MAGICK OF UNIMAGINABLE STRENGTH.
POWERFUL, YES--BUT LACKING IN CONSCIOUSNESS, SEEKING THE MEMORIES OF OTHERS.
THE GIRL PANICKED, AS ANY UNTRAINED MIND WOULD--AND GAVE FORM TO HER CHILDISH FEARS!

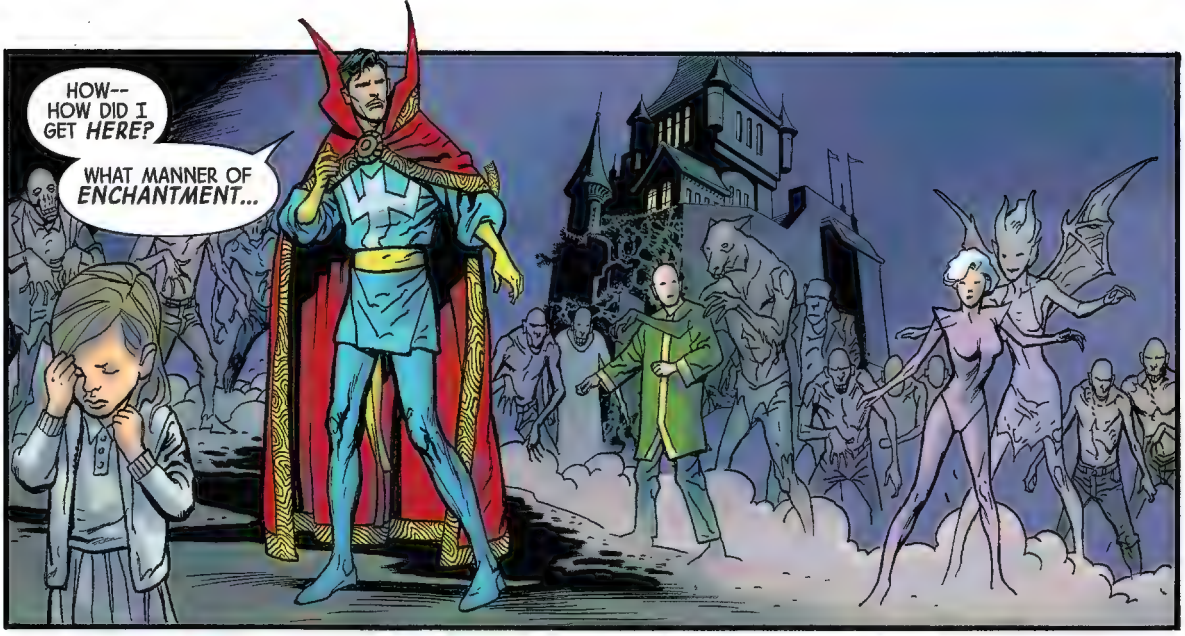
YOU WERE POSSESSED--
--AND SOMETHING IS CONTROLLING YOU AGAIN!
NOTHING CONTROLS ME, STRANGE!
POWER INHABITS ME! I CONTROL IT!
THEN WHY--
--WHY ARE YOU AFTER ME?
I TRIED TO HELP!
SMAK
IS THAT RIGHT?
YOU FOUND A CHILD WITH A TERRIBLE POWER SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND-- AND YOU TOOK IT AWAY.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
WELL, HERE'S A CLUE. I'M IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL.
I WANTED TO SAVE YOU!
IF I FAILED, I'M SORRY--BUT I'M SURE I DID ALL I COULD.

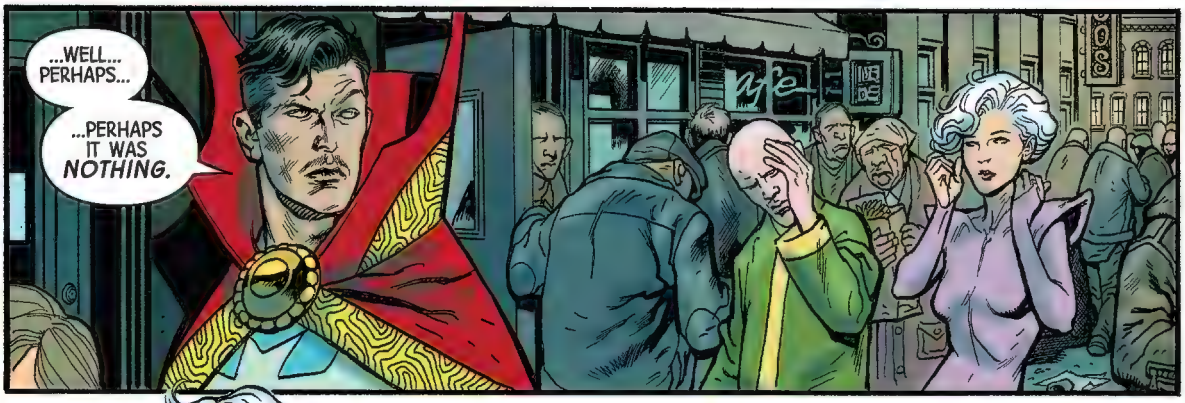
YOU DON'T EVEN REMEMBER ME!
YOU TOOK MY POWER AWAY AND LEFT WITHOUT EVEN A--A LOOK BACK!
NOW THE POWER'S RETURNED. I DON'T KNOW WHY, AND I DON'T CARE.
WHAT MATTERS IS EVERYTHING I REMEMBER REALLY HAPPENED!
NOBODY BELIEVED ME! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE?
OF COURSE YOU DON'T. YOU STORM IN AND DO WHATEVER YOU WANT TO WHOEVER'S IN THE WAY.
YOU KNOW WHAT'S BEST--YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHAT'S WRONG.
WELL, LOTS OF PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU, STRANGE. THEY HAVE A MEMORY OF YOU AT AVENGERS TOWER, OR DURING THE INVASION, OR WHATEVER.
MAKE THE THOUGHTS MALICIOUS--CARNIVOROUS, EVEN.
I CAN SEE THOSE MEMORIES, STRANGE--AND CONTROL THEM.
YOU'RE GOING TO BE TORN APART BY EVERYTHING EVERYONE THINKS OF YOU.
BUT WHY DID YOU SUDDENLY--OH. I UNDERSTAND.
YOU GOT THE POWER BACK...WHEN I REMEMBERED YOU.

HIS BROW LINED WITH CONCENTRATION, STEPHEN STRANGE KNOWS WHAT HE MUST DO--
--AND HE ALONE HAS THE STRENGTH TO DO IT!
MEMORIES EMERGE FROM HIS ASTRAL FORM--
--OF THE MONSTROUS SHUMA-GORATH, WHICH NEARLY DESTROYED REALITY--
--OF THE BARELY COMPREHENSIBLE BATTLE BETWEEN DORMAMMU AND ETERNITY--
--A MEMORY CONSIGNED TO THE DARKEST RECESSES OF THE SORCERER'S CONSCIOUSNESS.
MEMORIES LIKE THIS ARE FEW IN ANY WORLD...
...AND MORE THAN TEMPTING TO AN ENTITY WITH NO THOUGHTS OF ITS OWN!

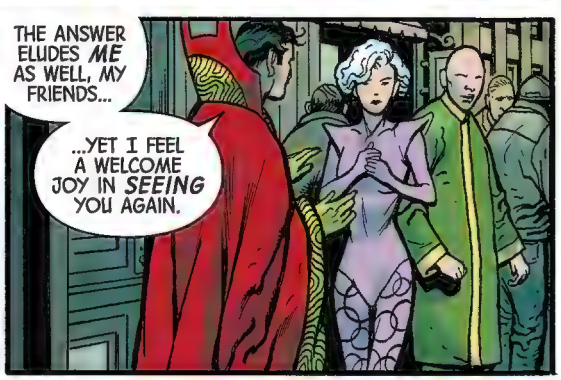

IGNORING THE PAIN, THE DOCTOR CALLS FORTH HIS MOST POWERFUL MEMORY...
...THAT OF THE CRASH WHICH RENDERED HIS HANDS UNFIT FOR SURGERY--
--THE MOMENT THAT SENT HIM ON THE PATH TO GREATNESS!
SENSING THE POWER OF THOUGHT-- OF EMOTION--
--TENDRILS OF MYSTIC DYNAMISM ENCIRCLE STRANGE'S MEMORY.
BUT THIS MINDLESS HORROR CANNOT HOPE TO GRASP THE STRENGTH OF INTELLECT IT FACES--
--AS STRANGE DRAWS UPON A REMEMBRANCE MERE MOMENTS OLD...
...AND THE ENCHANTED DIE IS CAST!

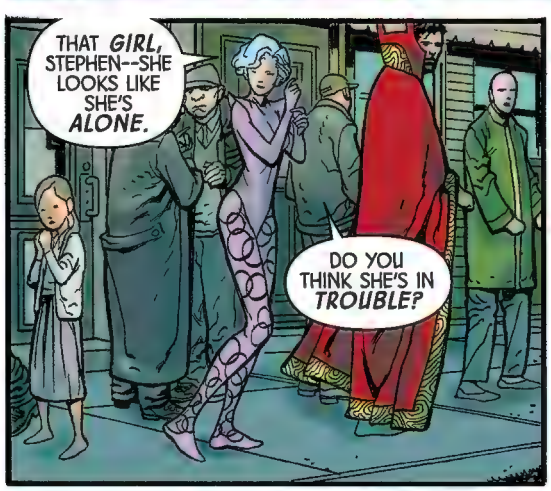
THE ACT REQUIRES *IMPOSSIBLE* CONCENTRATION--*PEERLESS MYSTICAL POWER*...
...AS THE *SPELL OF FORGETTING* ENVELOPS STRANGE'S MEMORY OF THE *HAUNTED GIRL*...
...*SUBLIMATING* THE RECOLLECTION TO AN *ABYSS* BLACKER THAN ANY OTHER...
...TRAPPING THE UNAWARE *ENERGY* IN ITS *EMBRACE*...
...AND VANISHING FROM CONSCIOUSNESS IN AN *ETHEREAL AMNESIA*.


HOW-- HOW DID I GET HERE?
WHAT MANNER OF ENCHANTMENT...


...WELL... PERHAPS...
...PERHAPS IT WAS NOTHING.

STEPHEN-- WHAT'S HAPPENED?
I DO NOT RECALL LEAVING HOME...


THE ANSWER ELUDES ME AS WELL, MY FRIENDS...
...YET I FEEL A WELCOME JOY IN SEEING YOU AGAIN.


THAT GIRL, STEPHEN--SHE LOOKS LIKE SHE'S ALONE.
DO YOU THINK SHE'S IN TROUBLE?

SOMETIMES WE MUST TRUST OUR SENSES, CLEA--AND MY SENSES TELL ME THAT, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST...
...ALL IS WELL WITH THE WORLD!

IT WASN'T.
MY "SENSES" WERE FOOLED BY MY OWN SPELL...FORGETTING THE THOUGHTLESS ENERGY TRAPPED INSIDE MY OWN MIND.
THOUGHTLESS, INDEED.
AND WHEN THE MAGIC DIED, SO DID THE SPELL.
ALL IT TOOK WAS A STRAY PHRASE TO JOG THE UNIMPRISONED MEMORY.
AND THE POWER WAS LOOSE--WITH NOTHING BUT THE MEMORY OF THE HAUNTED GIRL...
...WHERE I'D TRAPPED IT.
YOU TOOK AWAY MY POWER, STRANGE! I COULD HAVE BEEN--I COULD HAVE BEEN YOU!
YOU WERE OUT OF CONTROL!
I WAS A CHILD! OF COURSE I COULDN'T CONTROL THIS--
--BUT THAT DIDN'T MEAN I DIDN'T DESERVE TO LEARN. COULD YOU CONTROL YOUR POWERS THE FIRST TIME YOU TRIED THEM?
YOU TOOK EVERYTHING SPECIAL AWAY AND LITERALLY FORGOT YOU DID IT.
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?

YES... I DO.
SOMETHING THE OLD ME WOULD NEVER HAVE THE STRENGTH TO SAY.
I WAS WRONG.
WHAT?
I WAS TRYING TO HELP. I REALLY WAS.
I ASSUMED THE ENERGY WAS MALEVOLENT. AND YOU WERE OUT OF CONTROL.
BUT I CAN SEE HOW...FROM WHERE YOU WERE... MY CURE MAY HAVE BEEN NO BETTER THAN THE DISEASE.
I SHOULD HAVE TREATED YOU LIKE A PERSON--
--NOT A THING TO BE STRUGGLED OVER.

WELL... YEAH.

LOOK--YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M NOT AS STRONG AS I USED TO BE. THERE JUST ISN'T AS MUCH MAGIC ANYMORE.
HAVING THAT POWER AND LOSING IT...I KNOW IT'S NOT EASY.

YOU-- "IT'S NOT EASY"?
THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT OKAY!
SO NOW YOU UNDERSTAND ME BECAUSE YOU SORT OF HAVE TO DEAL WITH WHAT MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN LIKE?

BOO-HOO.

UNF.

I CAN HELP. I HAVE AN APPRENTICE. WE CAN TRY TO--
I REALLY DON'T WANT YOUR HELP.

I'M NOT EXACTLY APPRENTICE MATERIAL.
UGH. WHY AM I WASTING MY TIME WITH THIS?
I'VE HAD THESE POWERS FOR, LIKE, AN HOUR, TOTAL.

I'M SURE I CAN THINK OF BETTER THINGS TO DO WITH PEOPLE'S MEMORIES.

IN FACT...
...I THINK I ALREADY HAVE.

BE SEEING YOU, DOC.

WELL.
I SUPPOSE THAT DIDN'T GO AS BADLY AS IT COULD HAVE.
OW. WHAT THE HELL.
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY JAW? WHERE AM I?
SOMEBODY HIT YOU WITH A STOP SIGN AND YOU'RE IN A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL.
UH, VISITING OR...THE OTHER THING?
SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN. NOT TO BE BRUSQUE, BUT IT'S BEEN A LONG MORNING AND I DIDN'T FINISH BREAKFAST.
BECAUSE YOU REALIZED IT'S GROSS?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
YOU GONNA CLUE ME IN ON WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU COULD SAY...I WAS REMINISCING.
LET'S GO HOME, ZELMA.

NEXT ISSUE:

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